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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2016

TAGS: KCRM PREL PTER LE SY

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI PREPARED TO PASS TRIBUNAL,  
EXPECTS SHIA RESIGNATIONS AND VIOLENCE

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).  
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SUMMARY

¶11. (C) The Ambassador and Econoff met with Saad Hariri on November 11 to discuss the results of that morning's national consultations and the March 14 coalition's plans. Hariri reported that the coalition is unified, will not back down in refusing to give the pro-Syrians and Aoun a blocking minority, and intends to approve the UN tribunal drafts on Monday. Hariri predicted that the Shia cabinet ministers would resign, and that Lebanon was likely to see additional bombings and assassinations soon, as Syria and its allies feel more threatened by the approval of the tribunal. A half hour into the meeting, one of Hariri's staff announced that the Shia cabinet ministers had resigned. Finally, Hariri asked for greater U.S. military assistance to Lebanon. End Summary.

MARCH 14 REMAINS UNITED, DETERMINED

¶12. (C) the Ambassador began by congratulating the March 14 coalition for holding fast and making Hizballah think twice about taking to the streets. Hariri commented that the March 14 coalition indeed remains solid, the Prime Minister is "very strong," and the group will fight "all the way" to retain Justice Minister Charles Rizk.

¶13. (C) Responding to the Ambassador, Hariri reported that the March 14 coalition is not working to split Aoun away from Hizballah. At the same time, they can see that Aoun's followers don't want to be a part of street violence and there is some potential for a split in the Aoun camp. Hariri criticized Aoun for being inflexible and having a history of alliance with the Syrians. Hariri had been serious about offering Aoun inclusion in the cabinet, giving him four seats and expanding the cabinet to 30. He believes that many Christians are asking the Maronite Patriarch to tell Aoun to accept just four cabinet slots, but Aoun is unwilling to compromise. Hizballah pretended to support Aoun for the presidency, but before the war Nasrallah had told Hariri that he would never trust Aoun. There is no new hope for a change in the presidency, and control of the presidency is another reason why Hizballah and Aoun insist on a blocking minority (one third of the cabinet plus one).

¶14. (C) Hariri said that he now has absolutely no dialogue with Hizballah. He tried to see Hassan Nasrallah at the end

of Ramadan but Nasrallah refused him. "I've tried to find a solution, and in this showdown with Hizballah, my conscience is clear," Hariri remarked. "We tried to find a way to work with them in the government and they fought to stay with Iran."

SAAD PREDICTS RESIGNATIONS,  
VIOLENCE, TRIBUNAL PASSAGE

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¶ 15. (C) Hariri predicted that pro-Syrian cabinet ministers would resign on Saturday, without specifying grounds for their resignation, and expected Syrian-ordered bombings and assassinations to follow. A half hour into the meeting with the Ambassador, one of Hariri's staff interrupted the meeting with the news that the five Shia cabinet ministers had resigned from the cabinet. Hariri immediately commented, "this is all for the tribunal." Hariri favored the idea that PM Siniora not accept the resignations, commenting that the ministers leaving the government at such a time of national crisis is "unacceptable." Such people can't be trusted with a blocking minority. He also vowed to proceed with Monday's cabinet meeting and passage of the international tribunal legislation.

¶ 16. (C) Hariri said the tribunal is the first real move against Syria under the current government, and will create a new mood in the country. Short of killing Siniora, nothing can stop the cabinet from signing the draft legislation on Monday. The document has been officially circulated and added to the cabinet agenda. Although Lahoud may not come to the cabinet meeting in an effort to cripple it, the cabinet will override the President's objection and the resignations won't disrupt the cabinet's 2/3 majority. Hariri attributed the withdrawal of Russian objections to the tribunal

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documents to French President Chirac's influence.

¶ 17. (C) Hariri worried that increased radical allegiance to Hizballah since the war could be translated into allegiance to Iran, which would be dangerous if Khamenei issues a fatwa to bring down the GOL. Hizballah knows that street action will lose for the party all that it has gained in the Arab world but, Hariri wondered, will Hizballah prompt this nonetheless? Hizballah is now seeking GOL guarantees that it will not try to disarm Hizballah's forces, rather than seeking the personal guarantees of individual leaders that previously satisfied them.

U.S. ASSISTANCE NEEDED

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¶ 18. (C) Hariri urged that the U.S. take action against Syria ("move the Sixth Fleet offshore Latakia and see what happens"), and asked what the U.S. was prepared to do if bombings and assassinations started again. He urged more U.S. aid to the LAF. He is planning to accompany a parliamentary delegation to visit Congress, and suggested that the U.S. send a naval presence to Lebanon to intimidate Hizballah and prevent it from acting." He also asked that U.S. officials "be bullish" on Paris III, urging that pledges be twice as large as at Paris II.

COMMENT

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¶ 19. (C) Rumors are circulating in Beirut that Hariri had made -- and then broke -- a deal with Nabih Berri and Hizballah (via MP Mohammed Ra'ad) that, in return for Shia support of the special tribunal, Hariri would get March 14 leaders on board for conceding a blocking minority to the Shia and Michel Aoun. With us, Hariri absolutely rejected the concept of giving up the blocking minority. We don't know what the truth is. It is plausible that the impetuous Hariri would have been so ill-advised as to offer such a

trade-off and then faced rejections by Jumblatt, Siniora, and others. But it is equally plausible that the pro-Syrians are planting such a story knowing that it will be believed and will contribute to resentment against Hariri by all sides.

FELTMAN